# Your Inner Gift: Cultivating the Art of Simplicity in Photography

## Session 2: *The "Eye" – seeking simplicity in the environment*

This session will expand on the idea of "seeing" in photography that we mused on briefly in Session 1, and help you find potential subjects to photograph. We will see how cultivating simplicity is synonymous with achieving an expanded awareness of place and time. We will explore how our state of mind determines what is visible to us and profoundly influences what we most strongly resonate with in our surroundings, and provide examples and exercises to heighten our powers of observation and perception.

### Inner and Outer Landscapes

> *"The state of mind of the photographer while creating is blank… For those who would equate 'blank' with a kind of emptiness, I must explain that this is a special kind of blank. It is a very active state of mind really, a very receptive state of mind, ready at an instant to grasp an image, yet with no image pre-formed, pattern or preconceived idea of how anything ought to look is essential to this blank condition. Such a state of mind is not unlike a sheet of film itself – seemingly inert, yet so sensitive that a fraction of a second's exposure conceives life in it."* – Minor White

Although the subject of our second session is ostensibly the external world – How do I find things to photograph? How do I keep from getting bored when visiting the same places? What else is there to see beyond rocks, trees, and water? – it is inextricably entwined with our inner landscapes. What (and where and when) we choose to point our camera at depends at least as much on who we are as thinking and feeling creatures – our interests, our predilections, our evolving philosophies on life – as it does on the purely physical elements we happen to be surrounded by at any given moment.

Why do we choose to go click *here* as opposed to *there*? In the broadest sense, the reason why we are in a particular place at a given time may be due entirely to our own choices (e.g., we choose to go to Hawaii for a vacation) or a combination of our own predispositions and external constraints (the headquarters of the company we choose to work for has moved to a new city). On a deeper level, wherever we are, what we choose to point our camera at is obviously an expression of what attracts us. Someone who loves being around horses, for example, but detests lizards, is obviously likely to train her camera on the former and to deliberately avoid any contact at all with the latter. And no photographer – no artist of any kind – can create works of lasting value about subjects that she does not care deeply about. A photograph – as a physical artifact – necessarily depicts *something*; it is an image *<u>of</u>* something. But as a work of art, as an artifact of the creative process, a photograph also needs to be *<u>about</u>* something. And the meaning behind what that "something" is must be supplied by the mind and soul of the artist. The first step is to learn to observe; namely, to "see" familiar things as though for the first time. And to do this, you must first be in tune with yourself.

## Seeing vs. *Visualizing*

An essential part of "being in tune" with yourself is learning to appreciate the difference between "seeing" (something "out there") and *visualizing* how a captured image of it will communicate why we chose to "look" at something in the first place. While seeing is a passive act that requires little more than being attentive to one's environment (which is not to say that it is easy; it is a learned skill that takes time and patience to cultivate and nourish properly), visualization is a proactive creative process, whereby the photographer willfully and deliberately arranges, combines, and otherwise manipulates visual cues and information to convey a specific idea, feeling, or narrative. Seeing records (what catches our attention, as photographers, and compels us to train our camera at); visualizing instructs what we need to do with what we see and record. The latter is, by far, the more difficult of the two – indeed, it is at the very heart of photography – since it requires not just an intimate familiarity with the purely technical aspects of image making (determining exposure settings, calculating hyperfocal distances, or deciding when and how to convert a color image to black and white), but the ability to imagine, in your mind's eye, what each of these technique entails visually and narratively, in whatever final form you wish to communicate our idea in (gallery print vs. computer screen vs. poster). While technical skills can be learned and mastered relatively quickly, visualization is a skill that requires a lifetime of study and will naturally evolve over time. Since visualization derives from and embodies your unique attributes as an artist (your experience, skills, and spiritual and aesthetic sensibilities), the more "in tune" you are with what most deeply interests you and what you wish your images to communicate to others, the more expressive and meaningful – and personally satisfying – your photography will become.

*Ansel Adams*

Perhaps the earliest (certainly the best known) examples of visualization is Ansel Adams' *Monolith, The Face of Half Dome* (I provide a link because of possible copyright infringement):

http://spirittea.co/tea-blog/monolith-face-of-half-dome

Captured in 1927, and as Adams describes it in his autobiography,[1] Half Dome in Yosemite National Park is a "wondrous place… a great shelf of granite, slightly overhanging, and nearly 4000 feet above its base…the most exciting subject awaiting me… In early mid-afternoon, while the sun was creeping upon it, I set up and composed my image…I did not have much space to move about in: an abyss was on my left, rocks and brush on my right." What Adams *saw* was "the majesty of the sculptural shape of the Dome in the solemn effect of half sunlight and half shadow." But after he took his shot he realized that it would not convey what he *visualized* in his mind's eye. Having but one photographic plate left to expose, he realized that the only way to realize his image was to use a deep red filter (in order to render the blue sky

[1] Ansel Adams, *Ansel Adams: An Autobiography*, Little, Brown and Company; Revised ed. Edition, 1985.

almost pitch black, thus creating the dramatic effect that matched what he felt about the scene):

> "I began to think about how the print was to appear, and if it would transmit any of the feeling of the monumental shape before me in terms of its expressive-emotional quality. I began to see in my mind's eye the finished print I desired: the brooding cliff with a dark sky and the sharp rendition of distant, snowy Tenaya Peak. I realized that only a deep red filter would give me anything approaching the effect I felt emotionally. I had only one plate left. I attached my other filter, a Wratten #29(F), increased the exposure by the sixteen-times factor required, and released the shutter. I felt I had accomplished something, but did not realize its significance until I developed the plate that evening.
>
> I had achieved my first true visualization!
>
> I had been able to realize a desired image: not the way the subject appeared in reality but how it felt to me and how it must appear in the finished print."

This incident in 1927 eventually led Adams to develop his *Zone System* of exposure.

*Galen Rowell*

There is also this wonderful story I'd like to share with you about the late great photographer-adventurer Galen Rowell (1940-2002). Rowell pioneered "participatory (wilderness) photography," in which the photographer becomes an active creative participant in fine-art image making. An accomplished outdoorsman and adventurer, his deep emotional connection to nature pervades virtually all of his photographs. Another signature characteristic is his vivid use of color during the "magic hour" (at sunrise and sunset); indeed, it is arguably true that Rowell was as much a "master of color" as Ansel Adams was a master of black & white. (It is fitting that Rowell received the Ansel Adams Award for his contributions to the art of wilderness photography in 1984.) The life of this extraordinary artist was cut tragically short in 2002 when the plane carrying Rowell and his wife (Barbara Rowell, herself an accomplished photographer) crashed as they were both returning home from a Workshop in the Sierra Mountains.

The story I wish to recount is about one of Rowell's best-known (and one of his personal favorite) images, *Rainbow over the Potala Palace*:

https://people.creighton.edu/~ars81325/images/Photo%20JMC/Book%20Report/rowell1.jpg

According to Rowell,[2] this image was captured not long after a trekking group (consisting of about 15 people) that Rowell was a part of in Tibet was called to dinner. A rainbow suddenly

[2] "The Power of Participatory Photography," pages 41-43 in *Inner Game of Outdoor Photography*: https://www.amazon.com/Galen-Rowells-Inner-Outdoor-

appeared in a field below them, though not (from the point of view of the trekkers at that particular moment, as they were all settling down to dinner) in the spot that it appears in Rowell's subsequent photograph. Rowell, relying on his years of experience with optical phenomena in diverse environments, imagined in his mind's eye the precise spot he must get to from which the rainbow would appear to emanate from the roofs of the Dalai Lama's Potala Palace. Dropping his dinner, and running into the fields as fast as he could to get to where he knew he had to position himself, he managed to capture this incredible photograph. None of the other trekker/photographers budged an inch; although many later "claimed" to have captured the same image. In fact, none of the other images even came close to having the same drama, with the rainbows in other "versions" (having been captured from obviously wrong angles) either badly missing the Palace or invisible altogether. Only in Rowell's photograph does the rainbow rise majestically out from the Palace. Only Rowell had the forethought, intuition and strength of will to get himself, his camera and his "eye" into the right place at the right time.

Rowell, in his essay (see previous footnote), quotes Jacob Bronowski, who finds a similar pattern in the history of scientific creativity: "The mind is roving in a highly charged active way and is looking for connections, for unseen likenesses...It is the highly inquiring mind which at that moment seizes the chance...The world is full of people who are always claiming that they really made the discovery, only they missed it."

This little story teaches us that a great natural scene is not always (perhaps even rarely!) enough, by itself, for a fine art photograph. It is not enough to be properly attentive, but then sit patiently, passively, awaiting the right confluence of light, tone, texture and form to present itself; one must imagine the exact inner/outer point where that magical confluence will arise, and then act swiftly, and decisively, to grab it!

***Visualization as an evolving skill***

Example #1 – *Kauai, Hawaii*

In Session 1, I shared one of my favorite Zen sayings (attributed to Seigen Ishin, 9th Century Zen teacher):

*"Before I had studied Zen for thirty years,*
*I saw mountains as mountains, and waters as waters…;*

*When I arrived at a more intimate knowledge, I came to the point where I saw that mountains are not mountains, and waters are not waters.*

*But now that I have got its very substance I am at rest.*
*For it's just that I see mountains once again as mountains,*
*and waters once again as waters."*

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Photography/dp/0393338088/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1499020179&sr=8-1&keywords=Inner+Game+of+Outdoor+Photography

The story describes how one initially sees everything in its literal form. Through study and practice, one comes to realize that all things are manifestations of a deeper underlying reality; the interconnections between things become more important than the things themselves. Eventually, when one gains enlightenment (in our case, gaining a proficiency in "seeing" and "visualizing" will do), one appreciates things for what they really are; eternal sources of impermanence.

The more deeply immersed you become in the creative process, the more frequently will you encounter local echoes of Ishin's Zen story (indeed, recognizing that "mountains are not mountains" is a key signpost that you are on your way to becoming not just an "image taker," but a *photographer*). In my case, I have seen this process carried out over multiple trips to the Kauai, the northern most main island in the Hawaiian chain.

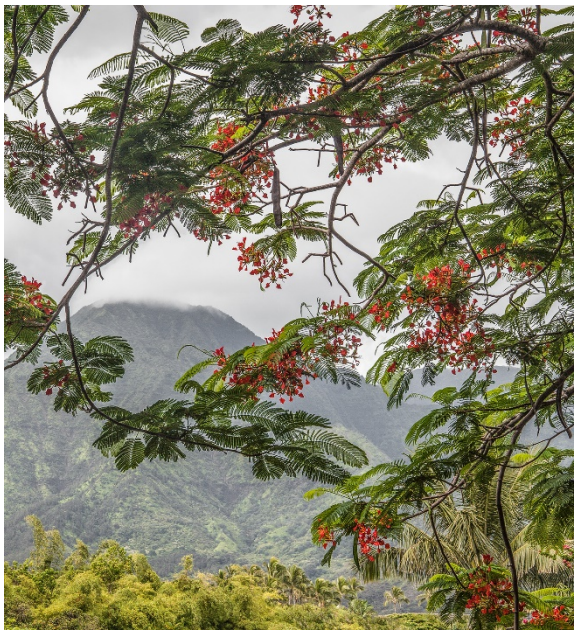
Kauai and I have a 35+ year history together. Though I have never called Kauai home (my wife and I live on the eastern coast of the U.S., but have Kauai on our list of possible places to retire to), I have visited the so-called *Garden Isle* multiple times (8 trips in all); the first when I was but a wet-behind-the-ears graduate student in the early 1980s, the last, a few years ago with my wife and two teenage sons.

My experience – my *visualization* – of Kauai has evolved considerably over the years, as I've matured as a person and photographer, and as my encounters with the island have become increasingly focused and intimate. Looking back on a 35+ year (and still evolving) journey, I see that the path my visualization has taken perfectly mirrors the arc of Seigen Ishin's story:

*When I first visited Kauai, over 35 years ago, I was in awe of its natural beauty, and too overwhelmed by its Wagnerian vistas to see past its post-card panoramas, and grand, sweeping landscapes and seascapes. Mountains and waters were most definitely nothing but mountains and waters!*

s2-i1

*Subsequent trips opened my eyes to more intimate views of Hawaii's Garden Isle. Having "seen" and photographed Kauai's better known places on my early trips – in most cases, multiple times – my eye soon turned to examining the details of places I had visited before.*



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*I became ever more intimately acquainted with quieter, humbler, parts of Kauai, and found my earlier color images gradually transitioning to B&W (my "natural" way of seeing).*

s2-i3

*As my trips accrued, my eyes slowly tuned to "seeing" more of Kauai's well guarded secrets.*

s2-i4

*I felt an increasingly deeper connection to Kauai's softer, subtle rhythms.*

s2-i5

*Eventually, as any meaningful distinctions among seeing, experiencing, and visualizing Kauai in a photograph dissolved, waters became waters once again.*

s2-i6

Compare this last photograph (taken during my last visit to Kauai in 2014) to the first "vista" on the bottom of page 4 (captured many years ago). Notice the distinctly different character each displays. Apart from obvious differences (panorama vs. intimate seascape, color vs. B&W), there is a marked difference in the emotional quality of the two images. While the panorama is imbued with a certain serenity, it is of a postcard "point and shot" variety at best; it is sterile, and offers little more than the "view of a thing itself" can give – "mountains," in this case, are truly nothing more than "mountains."

Now look at the photograph above. It is also serene, but the nature of the serenity on display here is of an altogether different character. It is not just a picture of a serene scene – or of what a what a "thing" is – it also evokes a *feeling* of serenity, and transports the viewer's attention away from the scene itself.

*"Seeing is not enough; you have to feel what you photograph."* — Andre Kertesz

Where, in the earlier photograph, the viewer is presented with – and attention squarely focused on – a specific view of Kauai's north coast, the rock, water, and hints of clouds in the above photograph above are all secondary to the emotion the image as a whole evokes in the viewer's mind's eye. The palpable sense of quiet in this image is what I feel most often when I travel to Kauai. It is also something that took me nearly 30 years to visualize during my visits there, as I was busy paying heed to Ishin's Zen lesson on seeing "waters once again as waters."

Example #2 – *"Chance Favors the Prepared Mind"*

"Chance favors the prepared mind," Ansel Adams was fond of saying (though the original quote comes from Louis Pasteur). I was reminded of the wisdom of this aphorism during a trip my family and I took to Coral Gables, Florida. Armed, as usual, with my camera-bag's worth of equipment, I had a carefully preconceived plan in place to visit some of my favorite "photo-safari" haunts. I know the area well from my many visits, and places such as Fairchild Gardens and Vizcaya were firmly at the top of my list. While they didn't disappoint (they never do), and each offers delightful compositional opportunities, through no fault of theirs - since I was the one who deliberately chose them for my photo-safari - my muse was unfortunately struggling to stay awake.

There is a feeling, roughly analogous to the common dream of running through molasses, that overcomes all photographers at some point when they've prepared too much. Everything is "right", all the equipment works, the lenses are clean, the camera bag has exactly what you need, the light is right, the location is right, beautiful vistas are all around you, and ... nothing happens. There is no magic. No spark. You lift your (strangely, much heavier-than-normal) camera to your eye, and - maybe - at some point click its shutter more to alleviate the growing boredom than because of anything that strikes your aesthetic eye as "interesting." And yet, everything, objectively speaking, is perfect. How can that possibly be?, you wonder; Everything is just right. It is something that afflicts all photographers and artists at some point.

Now, skip ahead to the last day of my family's trip. The rain starts to fall in the morning, and is unrelenting; and with it, so I think, wash away my last hopes of savoring an "Aha!" moment at Fairchild or Vizcaya. Finally, the sky clears, it is late in the day, and my kids want to go feed the pelicans at a nearby park (Matheson Hammock Park Beach). Sulking from my trip-long funk, I want to leave my camera behind (something I almost never do). My wife (as she always does) reminds me that I almost never do that, and gently urges me to bring it along, which I do, reluctantly (and expect nothing more than to get some quick grabs of the kids feeding their pelicans, if even that). Which is, indeed, exactly what happens. No muse, no sparks, just that same monotonous, lifeless "clicks" as before...and then the magic happens!... just as the kids finish feeding their pelicans and everyone starts walking back toward our car.

While putting away my camera, my trip-long, nearly comatose "photographer's eye/intuition" finally awakens, and forces me to glance over my shoulder...and I am

absolutely transfixed by the magnificent cacophony of lines, shadows and light playing on the rapidly darkening, and by now deserted, marina. Literally breathlessly, I reset my tripod, rifle through my bag for a 3-stop ND filter (to get at least a 15 sec exposure to blur the small waves), compose more on instinct than design, and take one shot. At which time my wife and kids are already getting antsy, and remind me that dinner is waiting and that they're all hungry. And the magic goes Poof!

s2-i7

But what a moment. That one shot that day proved to be by far my best shot of the whole trip. It is also the one shot I didn't plan on taking at all; although I *was* prepared! I shall always remember this little lesson in humility, though I admit that such experiences still take me by surprise when they happen. Although I almost always *plan* on going to certain places (that's my particular style), and always have at least some idea of what I'm "after" when I get there (in concept, if not detail), I also always try to be prepared for when chance decides to pay me a quick visit. Indeed, as photographers, we live for these moments!

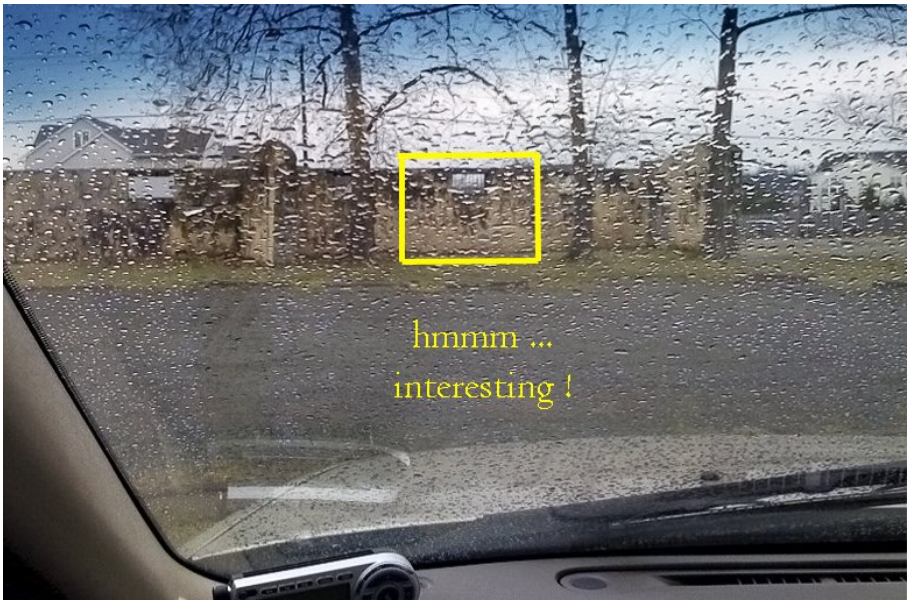
Example #3 – *On the Art of Discovering Photos on a Drab Day*

"I find that if I sit down a minute and relax, a solution always presents itself…."
– Professor Henry Jones (from *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*)

So there I was, sometime in March of 2009, sitting in my car, in the rain, after traveling an hour or so from my home in northern Virginia to a park (I've never been to before) not far from Leesburg (Red Rock Wilderness Park). My wife found the park for me on the web, and read that it has some nice views of the Potomac. I had a few hours to myself – my wife knows well my "Oooh, nice diffused light out there today!" look – and so decided to do a photo-reconnaissance run. And it started out great: no rain, nice cloud cover, nippy but not cold.

But soon I found my fortunes waning. I got lost – twice – started hearing funny sounds from the engine and had the "check engine" light come on (which turned out to be a minor but expensive service for which I also had to lose a few hours from my "day job" in the coming days), and it started raining, hard. There was really nothing to do once I got there but wait; though, because of the time I lost getting lost, I did not have all that much time to waste. Oh, and my iPhone started running out of power, so *YouTube* was was going fast as well.

Dire situation, all right! Of course, I expected my Russian blood to kick into high gear and make for an afternoon's worth of angst and brooding;-) What a mess! But wait...I did manage to snap one simple photo with my iPhone to send my wife to show her my predicament. The picture showed nothing but the parking lot and a part of the stable ruins that are still standing in the park. Predictably, just as I sent the email with the photo, my iPhone died. So, I kept staring out my window, feeling sorry for myself, cursing the weather, cursing the battery in my iPhone, daydreaming a bit, but also becoming increasingly mesmerized by a particular section of wall, outlined in yellow below:




s2-i8

*** Please bear with me, as the story now takes a strange turn…after which we'll return to "reality" and derive a few lessons on how to "see" and "visualize" our environment ***

*Here is what went through my mind as I was sitting and staring at the gloomy and "uninteresting" little scene outside my car's window …*

…It was not – as it is in reality – an exposed section of an old wall of a Civil-war-era stable, but rather a fortified section of a phantasmagoric prison cell (a metaphoric echo of my inner Russian angst?). I imagined all kinds of Borgesian tales[3] behind the incarceration of "prisoners" held here throughout the decades (... centuries, millenia, ... just when was it built?). Alchemists imprisoned by Illuminati minions devoted to keeping a lid on secrets best not revealed? Uber-geniuses – long since forgotten in the mists of time – who stumbled upon eternal and shocking truths, and were unceremoniously dumped into locked cells to live out the rest of their lives in abandoned sarcophagi? Perhaps these ruins were even once called home by the "Old One", who quietly inserted himself into our realm to taste life of the flesh; yearning – like many of Kazantzakis' heroes – to just revel in the struggle between earth and spirit. What became of the "Old One" I wonder; and is he – still? – struggling, even after the walls of his prison have crashed down around him so long ago? Or was something even more mysterious once living within these walls – something for which to this day there are still no words, no languages, that adequately describe "it" except in the vaguest, most imprecise terms – something that the prison was never meant to contain at all, but was rather built to prevent everything on the outside of its walls from ever getting in? What happened when the walls came down? Have the strange symbols been deliberately etched onto the textured walls by the creature (or creatures) that escaped? Are they ciphers of clues to what awaits us all? Clues to how we might find a way out of an invisible prison that still surrounds us? That contains our cosmos? That is our cosmos?

Such were my (admittedly, slightly bizarre) musings as I watched the stable wall ruin out my window, wondering if the rain was ever going to stop and whether my car was well enough to get me back home when it did. Finally, there was a small break in the clouds, and the rain slowed to a drizzle. I got out my camera, steadied it on the trunk of my car, and took a single shot. I knew how the final image would look even before I pressed the shutter. It would hint – but only hint – of the surreal Borgesian world (just on the cusp between the real and unreal) my mind's eye was lucky enough to briefly glimpse on this otherwise drab "uninteresting" day in the park. It is a photo of what was in the Red Rock Wilderness Park that day. it is also a photo of what ***else*** was in the park that day. Discovering photos such as this is why I love fine-art photography.

[3] Jorge Luis Borges (1899 - 1986) – one of my all-time favorite writers – was an Argentine short-story writer, writer, essayist, and poet, known for his metaphysical musings. His stories deal with such subjects as labyrinths, mirrors, multiple realities, dreams, etc. Ref: Jorge Luis Borges, *Labyrinths*, New Directions, 2007.

The point of this story is not to somehow connect Borges to photography. It is meant only to illustrate how who we are – our memories, our interests, our stream-of-consciousness thoughts – all contribute to how we perceive our surroundings. And, in this case, for me, my lifelong predilection for musing about other-wordly metaphysical realities (ala Borges) inspired me to capture one of my favorite photographs.

s2-i1

s2-i9

## Lessons from Johann Wolfgang von Goethe and Gregory Bateson

*"The hardest thing to see is what is in front of our eyes."* –Goethe

Goethe, as you all likely know (and have probably read at some point in school or for pleasure), was a prodigiously talented German writer (1749 – 1832) and latter-day renaissance figure: he was a poet, playwright, novelist, statesman, scientist, and artist. Among his better-known works of fiction are *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, *The Sorcerer's Apprentice*, *Roman Elegies*, and *Faust*. The part of his life I wish to focus on for at least a few paragraphs is his science, which is vastly underappreciated; particularly on the deep lessons we can draw from it that pertain to "seeing" both as scientists and photographers. I hardly have the room here to do this important topic justice, and will provide references for those of you who wish to pursue these ideas later for yourselves. If I momentarily put my "complexicologist" hat back on (recall, from Session 1, that my "day job" consists of studying the physics of complex systems), I can say that Goethe's views on science (and how nature ought to be perceived) were about 200 years ahead of his time!

In a word, Goethian science is innately *holistic*. Goethe strived to understand nature not as an assemblage of parts, but as organic evolving wholes. Henri Bortoft – in his masterful work on Goethe's way of thinking[4] – describes this holistic approach to "knowing" as "dwelling in the phenomenon" instead of "replacing it with a mathematical representation." It is reminiscent of a story that the late great physicist Richard Feynman (1918 - 1988) once told about a lesson his dad taught him as a child about the difference between the *name* of something that is alive and the *living thing itself*. His father, who was a methodical observer of nature, delighted in sharing with his son his voluminous mental notes on the rich lives of all the birds that lived in their neighborhood; when they came out in the morning, what songs they sang, what food they ate, and so on. All of this Feynman's father learned on his own, not by reading books, but by carefully watching and listening to the birds for years and years. Young Richard's lifelong lesson came one day when his peers laughed at him for not knowing any of the birds' names, something he never learned from his father (who himself did not know). His father gently explained to Richard that he actually knew far more about the birds than any of his friends: "All your friends know is a jumble of sounds that help them point to a particular bird. Only you know who those birds really are!"

This holistic approach to "knowing" is quintessentially Goethian. It derives from the simple observation that living beings are growing, evolving processes that are as much "things in themselves" as interconnected components of lesser and greater processes. To identify any one state of such a being with the being itself – i.e., by using a "name" to designate "what the system is" at some arbitrary time during the course of its evolution (such as by taking a picture of a tree in your yard one day and calling it "the tree in my yard" – is to miss completely what the being really is; namely, an organic instantiation of a continually unfolding dynamic process of evolution, metamorphosis, and transformation.

In his *The Metamorphosis of Plants*,[5] published in 1790, Goethe describes "the truth about the how of an organism." Goethe had long been intrigued by the diversity of floral forms. Inspired by observations made during a trip to Italy (1786-1788)…

> "While walking in the Public Gardens of Palermo, it came to me in a flash that in the organ of the plant which we are accustomed to call the leaf lies the true Proteus who can hide or reveal himself in vegetal forms. From first to last, the plant is nothing but leaf, which is so inseparable from the future germ that one cannot think of one without the other."

…Goethe took it upon himself to discover a unity of form in diverse structures. Through careful, intensely attentive and mindful observation, he came to see plants not as "things," but as dynamic, continually self-transforming organisms. A "plant" is not any *one* of the momentary glimpses we may happen to catch of it; it refers tom the entire life's history of its evolution from a seed to bud to mature body to eventual decay.

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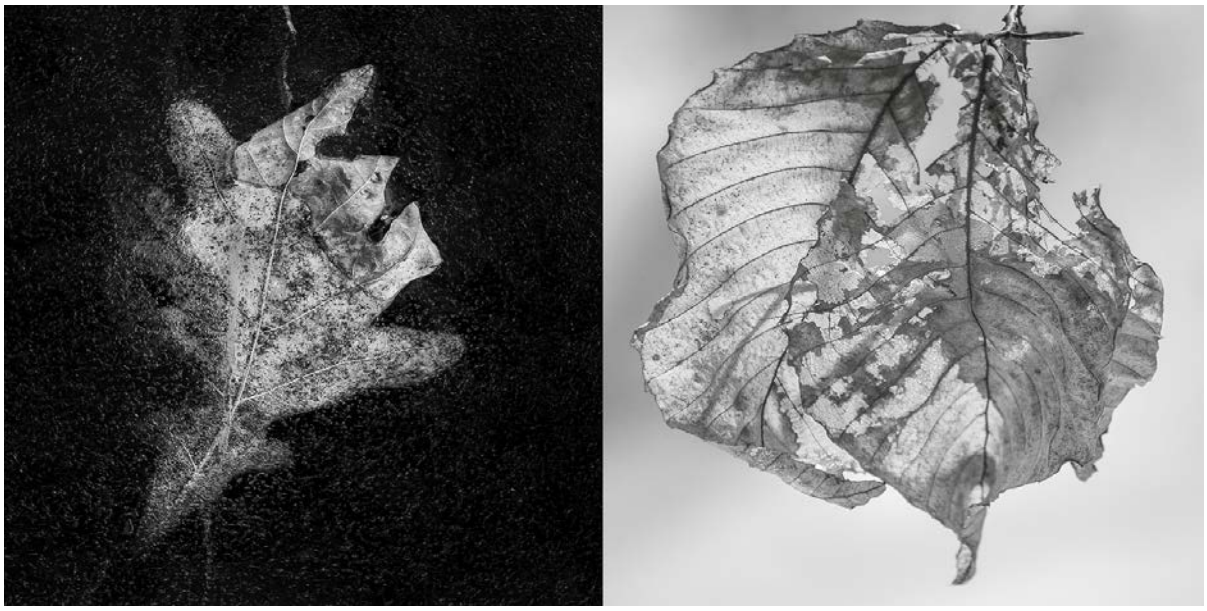
[4] Henri Bortoft, *The Wholeness of Nature: Goethe's Way Toward a Science of Conscious Participation in Nature*, Lindisfarne Books, 1996.

[5] Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *The Metamorphosis of Plants*, MIT Press, 2009.



s2-i10

Friedemann Schwarzkopf (in his *The Metamorphosis of the Given: Toward an Ecology of Consciousness*), suggests that "...if one could imagine a person walking through the snow, and leaving the imprints of his feet, but with every step changing the shape of his feet, and if one would behold not the trace in the snow, perceptible to the sense-organs of the physiological eyes, but the living being that is undergoing change while it is walking, one would see with the inner eye the organ of the plant that is producing leaves."

*And what of the lesson for the photographer?* If only we could see the world as Schwarzkopf and Goethe suggest we see a plant! The inner creative process that drives what we do – why and what we choose to look at, what moves us, what grabs our attention and demands to be expressed – is just as much a living force as what we train our lenses on in the world at large. I would argue that in order to become better – more impassioned, more sincere, more artfully truthful – photographers, requires a more Goethian approach. It requires us to learn how to *dwell in our subjects*. Don't focus on objects or things. In paying attention instead to process, we open ourselves up to discovering the "what else things are" parts of the world to photograph.

- **Exercise S2-1: *Goethian seeing***

Read two wonderful essays on Goethian perception. One is by Craig Holdredge, co-founder and director of *The Nature Institute*[6] (pages 16-19 deal specifically with Goethe's ideas about plant perception):

http://natureinstitute.org/pub/ic/ic31/goethe.pdf

[6] http://natureinstitute.org/about/staff/choldrege.htm

The other is by Henri Bortoft, who has arguably done more than anyone else to promulgate Goethe's holistic way of "seeing" (see footnote 4 at bottom of page 14):

https://waltermckone.wordpress.com/osteopathy/goethes-organic-vision/

Then look at a short YouTube video on the nature of perception. It is a short excerpt of an interview with Craig Holdredge and Arthur Zajonc, physicist and one-time president of the *Mind and Life Institute:*[7]

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gckaX49uDrA

**Gregory Bateson**

> "The division of the perceived universe into parts and wholes is convenient and may be necessary, but no necessity determines how it shall be done." – Gregory Bateson

Gregory Bateson (1904 - 1980) was one of the last century's most original thinkers. Trained as an anthropologist, Bateson made deep and lasting contributions to biology, cybernetics, and systems theory. He was also a gifted teacher. His published works are infused with a deep Goethian-like wisdom about how we must alter our perceptions in order to be able to "see" the parts of nature in a more holistic fashion.

One of Bateson's central ideas is that of the "Pattern that Connects," or *metapattern*, which means, literally, a pattern of patterns. This idea was first introduced in Bateson's masterwork – *Mind and Nature*[8] – in a story about how he sometimes pulled out a freshly cooked crab out of a bag and asked his students (who were typically nonscientists) to argue that the object represents the remains of a living being. The object of the Socratic exercise was to force his students to ponder the question, "What is the difference between the living and nonliving?" To answer this question, the students had to learn such concepts as relationship, symmetry and topology as they apply both within an organism (or object) and outside an organism (on higher levels). The deeper lesson was taking their first step toward appreciating the need for "discarding of magnitudes in favor of shapes, patterns, and relations."

*What does this have to do with photography and seeing?* Well, one can begin by drawing a lesson from Bateson's concept of *metapatterns*. A uniquely personal aesthetic grammar may be developed by following these three steps: (1) recognize that all conventional distinctions between objects are essentially arbitrary (i.e. learn to see the world as shape, pattern and relation rather than purely form), (2) draw your conscious attention to the visible boundaries between conventional forms that make up a photographic scene, and then (3) use your unconscious intuition to guide the camera, as a compositional tool, to recompose the scene

[7] https://www.mindandlife.org/

[8] Gregory Bateson, Mind and Nature: A Necessary Unity, Hampton Press, 2002.

as if it were made up of visual elements of your own choosing. In short, decompose the world into its basic building blocks, then build it back up the way you really see it.

- **Exercise S2-2: *Batesian seeing***

Look at a short YouTube video on Gregory Bateson delivering a lecture on perception:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BaHQBA8Z2Yc

- **Exercise S2-3: *The art of attentive observing***

Find a quiet spot in your office, study, kitchen, or park bench; wherever you can be alone for 30 minutes or so. Either bring with you some small object to study (say, a plant or leaf, to best follow in Goethe's footsteps, though any object will do), or choose to focus attention on an object in your immediate environment (say, a coffee maker or stove if in your kitchen, or a tree that might be outside the window of your study). Whatever the object, spend 20 to 30 minutes observing it. I'll use a leaf as an example, but the process will be the same regardless of what you choose. Look at the leaf, examine it with your eyes and fingers. What details can you see? What is the texture like? Is it rough, smooth, or bumpy? Are there tiny hairs? What is its overall color? What gradations of color do you see? Are there certain parts of the leaf that are more, or less, "interesting" than others? If the leaf has veins, look at them individually. How is one different from the others? Is the leaf pristine, or decayed? If it is an old leaf, does it have holes and other bruises? Draw the leaf in front of you. How does your drawing compare to what you see? In what ways; try to articulate as best you can. Has your drawing reproduced the contours of the leaf to your liking, or is your rendering off; in what way? I could go on, but the basic idea should be clear. Spend some time getting to know your "object of interest" without a camera. In the process, you will learn (a great deal, I suspect, if this is something you have never done before) about how you see things. Bank this experience as you go out into the world with camera in hand.

**Learning to Saunter**

Cultivating a receptivity to the natural rhythms of life around us is something that Henry David Thoreau and Ralph Waldo Emerson called *sauntering*. The idea is to simply walk in a state of relaxed attentiveness; with no particular purpose in mind other than just being open to whatever catches our attention. Though it sounds easy, it becomes so only after much practice. As anyone who has tried sitting still with one's eyes closed to meditate for the first time can attest, our minds are filled a constant inner chatter. It takes a dedicated effort to rid ourselves of this internal noise; a capacity that, once achieved, also needs constant nurturing and exercise to maintain. It is just as difficult, at first, to simply walk around with a quiet mind; to allow ourselves to notice whatever comes our way, without judging or thinking; to just let our eyes settle on what catches our attention.

- **Exercise S2-4: *Learning to saunter***

Part 1 – Read this wonderful summary of Thoreau's essay on walking:[9]

https://www.brainpickings.org/2014/11/17/thoreau-walking/

If you are so inclined, you can then read Thoreau's essay itself (it is relatively short), and published online by *The Atlantic*:

https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1862/06/walking/304674/

Part 2 –Set aside some time in a nearby park, the neighborhood around your home, or backyard; anyplace you can be sure you'll be alone for an hour or so, and not likely to be interrupted. Go for a walk ***without*** your camera! Take note of what you would have liked to take photographs of, if only the camera were with you. What catches your attention? Look at the details of light and shadow; the textures, the forms. Walk over to whatever object has caught your gaze. Examine it from multiple perspectives; hunch down, move your head back and forth, look at it from a higher view (stand on a rock or tree stump, if you can), see it in a different light (e.g., wait for a cloud to pass if it was shrouded in sunlight). When you lose interest, move on. See what else catches your attention. Do not willfully direct your attention anywhere (this is the tricky part); just let the moment take you where it may. Be attentive but intellectually disengaged (do not *reflect* on what you are doing, just do it); let your eye roam freely to what your unconscious mind finds interesting. Later, when the exercise is over, and as you prepare for bed, try to recall details of what you saw and felt during your saunter. You will use this experience in an exercise for a later session to actively engage your photographer's eye, the next time with camera in hand!

- **Exercise S2-5: *Searching for states-of-mind and feelings instead of things***

Spend some "photo safari" time (sauntering *with* your camera) while training your eye not on things (rocks, trees, and water) but on thoughts and feelings; the closer aligned those thoughts and feelings are with what you associate with the idea of "simplicity" the better (recall the word-cloud you put together as part of session 1): e.g., *quiet*, *stillness*, *balance*, *elegance*, *tranquility*. Since there are no "things" that are literally any of these states of mind, the exercise is really to teach yourself how to capture images that convey these states-of-mind and feelings. Of course, there is no one way, or "correct" way of achieving this; discover *your* way of doing this. Consider other emotions: *joy, sadness, remorse, anticipation*, *love* (you may want to review the John Loori video that appears at the end of session 1).

Again, please have some fun with the exercises. The goal of this second session is to get you to "see" the world in a slightly different way from how you may have viewed it before; simultaneously, and slightly paradoxically, both with an eye for detail, wherein objects become more than what just a cursory view alone suggests, and holistically, in which their very presence is discerned only via a mindfully attentive observing. The main lesson is to learn to cultivate a quiet inner "Goethian state of mind" so that we can become more naturally receptive to the things we most like to photograph. I look forward to hearing about your experiences on our *Facebook* workshop page.

[9] The essay is by Maria Popova, who is author and editor of one of my favorite blogs on art, science, and life. I encourage all of you to peruse this wonderful site. You will be rewarded with great reads and ideas to pursue in your mind and with your camera. Link: https://www.brainpickings.org/.